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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a collection of studies that examine interactions in preschool and school settings around the time of school entry. The studies are loosely organized around five themes: (1) differences between intended and experienced curricula, and intended and experienced patterns of interaction; (2) contingent and responsive nature of successful teaching and its dependence on capturing and recruiting interest, staying one step ahead of the learner, creating joint understanding, guiding the child to make links, and the importance of fully noting the social, affective, and intellectual aspects of the child's understanding; (3) effect of expectations on patterns of interaction and ultimately on learning outcome; (4) specific and characteristic nature of school discourse, its potential for restricting child-adult interactions, and its potential for making explicit though more often leaving implicit the nature, purposes, and principles of the learning to be undertaken; and (5) importance of the similarities or differences between children's previous broadly-defined learning experiences, such as language use, access to resources, and type of support in using resources, and their school performance. The studies suggest a wide range of investigative strategies and foci, including input/output, quantitative monitoring of types or aspects of interaction, action research, ethnographic study, focus on language and meanings, and focus on actions. (SM)

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"INTERACTION IN PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL SETTINGS AROUND THE TIME OF SCHOOL ENTRY"

Compiled by Jane Payler

Introduction

What is known to date of interaction around the time of school entry can be drawn together into five main strands of investigation. The studies point to the

1. differences between intended and experienced curricula, and intended and experienced patterns of interaction
2. contingent and responsive nature of successful teaching and its dependence on capturing and recruiting interest, staying one step ahead of the learner, creating joint understanding, guiding the child to make links, and the importance of noting fully the social, affective and intellectual aspects of the child's understanding
3. effects of expectations on patterns of interaction and ultimately on learning outcome
4. specific and characteristic nature of 'school' discourse, its potential for restricting child:adult interactions, and its potential for making explicit though more often leaving implicit the nature, purposes and principles of the learning to be undertaken
5. importance of the similarities or differences between children's previous broadly-defined learning experiences, such as language use, access to resources, and type of support in using resources, and their school performance.

The selected studies are loosely organised under the five points raised above, though it will be clear that some do not fit neatly into one category. Much of the work included is based on research carried out in naturalistic settings, though some is based on an experimental model of observing interaction in researcher-given tasks. The studies suggest a wide range of

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investigative strategies and foci including input/output, quantitative monitoring of types or aspects of interaction, action research, ethnographic study, focus on language and meanings, and focus on actions. Selection and limits of time and space inevitably mean that some studies are missed out. The list does not claim to be exhaustive.

1. **Anning, A.** (1998) ***The Education of Three- to Five-Year- Olds in the UK: Early Years Units as a Solution?*** BERA Conference paper, 27-30 August 1998, Belfast.
   This paper reports on the author's evaluation of a pilot scheme of Early Years Units (EYUs), school-based nursery provision for 3-5 year olds aimed at improving experiences of pre-school children, particularly reception-aged children. The report focuses on the intended curriculum and the curriculum experienced by the children. Most dominant views about the intended curriculum included the priority of promoting cognitive development in a broad, informal, play-based curriculum and referred explicitly to Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLOs). The research coded activities of 3, 4, and 5 year olds according to DLOs and according to pedagogic practice (child-centred, child-centred with limited range and teacher-directed). The results reveal quite different patterns of interaction between age groups with different learning priorities. The younger children appeared to 'flit' between largely physical, self-directed activities, while older children moved towards a pattern of teacher-directed language, maths, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative activities. The spread of curriculum coverage was apparent in teacher-directed activities for older children. Anning calls for clarification in the principles of pedagogic practice for 3-5 year old, with elements of progression delineated. It appears that the EYUs provided a microcosm of the transition from a pre-school to infant school discourse and pedagogy without enhancing, smoothing or questioning the nature of that transition and raises many questions about patterns and purpose of interaction.

   Munn, P. (1996) 'The interactive context of teaching and learning at the pre-school level' in *Education 3 to 13*, March 1996, pp. 20-26. UK: Primary Research and Development Group.
   Pre-*Desirable Outcomes*, the study aims to produce evidence on the nature of pre-school teaching and learning relating to the 'basics' of literacy and numeracy.

Interesting differences are noted in nursery teacher and nursery nurse 'narratives of learning', ideas about children's cognitive development, which influence provision and interaction. 'Group' ideas were more revealing than individual staff members' ideas. Children's progress over time (based on 20-minute informal interviews with children) was seen as slow and related more to general conceptual development rather than to attainment of sub-skills. It offers an input/output model, which leaves the question of the details of the processes of interaction involved unanswered.

Oliveira-Formosinho, J. (2001) 'The Specific Professional Nature of Early Years Education and Styles of Adult/Child Interaction' in *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* vol. 9, no. 1, pp 57-72.
The article argues that early year's professionalism has a distinct characterisation that makes early years 'teachers' different to other teachers. The differences lie in i) characteristics of the child, with the emphasis on 'whole' child, dependence and vulnerability; ii) differing institutional contexts with differing goals; iii) the processes and tasks performed by the practitioner including care and education in its broadest sense. The author concludes that early years practitioners' professional activity is characterised by an 'extensive network of interactions' (p. 61), not least at the level of child-initiated interaction.

The author used the engagement scale, Observation for Adult Performance, from the EEL Project (see Pascal, Bertram and Ramsden 1997 below) in an empirical study, comparing interaction profiles of 102 Portuguese early years practitioners with those of English practitioners. The results show the Portuguese profile to be weighted in the order of sensitivity (most observed), autonomy and stimulation. The English profile was sensitivity, stimulation, autonomy. The author suggests that the 'autonomy' section of the scale includes those aspects of interaction that foster higher psychological functions through mediation, a Vygotskian analysis of what at face value appears to a Piagetian child-centred view of education. The way in which the engagement scale is used here is, I think, open to question. The method implies that the link between frequency/time spent on a sub-type of interaction and its importance is equal for each of the three sub-scales (sensitivity, autonomy, stimulation). Whilst the descriptive and analytic elements of the sub-scales seem to

me to be of value, I would question the usefulness of attaching numeric values and using them to score and average. It appears to be a far more complex and inter-related process than this method implies.

Orchard, J. (1995) 'A Study of Time Utilisation in the Reception Class with Particular Reference to Teacher-Pupil Interaction' in *Early Child Development and Care*, vol. 115, pp 125-139.
This ethnographic study of four reception teachers aimed to find out to what extent and in which ways reception teachers conversed with their pupils. The patterns of interaction that emerge reflect other studies of teacher/pupil classroom interaction. The teacher is very fully occupied in a multitude of often-simultaneous tasks including classroom management, whole class teaching, small group facilitation, one-to-one reading and so forth. Interaction is teacher-dominated. It is teacher-led, extends to all members of the class, but from the children's point of view is brief, frequent and restricted. This did not reflect a lack of concern for interaction on the part of the teachers, but rather the reality of dealing with a complex curriculum with a large number of young children in limited time. Sustained detailed conversations between children and teacher were not part of the routine school day. The study lends weight to the argument that any theory or model relating to the guided construction of knowledge (Mercer 1995) or guided participation (Rogoff 1990) in schools must reflect the reality of the busy classroom and not be based purely on research with dyads or extended child-centred conversations.

Pascal, C., Bertram, T. and Ramsden, F. (1997)' The Effective Early Learning Research Project Reflections upon the Action during Phase 1' in *Early Years*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp 40-47.
The article is based on the Effective Early Learning Project 1993-97, with a view to evaluating and improving the quality and effectiveness of learning for 3 and 4 year olds. Of particular interest here are the two key observation techniques used for practitioner-based evaluation, which attempt to measure the effectiveness of the teaching and learning *process*. These are i) the involvement scale (child-centred) which attempts to measure process features such as child creativity, energy, persistence, concentration, and ii) the engagement scale (teacher-focused) which measures

adult features affecting the child's learning such as sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy. Using such scales are meant to act as catalysts and indicators for reflective practice with practitioners taking responsibility for improving quality.

Sylva, K., Roy, C. and Painter, M. (1980) *Childwatching at Playgroup and Nursery School.* London: Grant McIntyre.
This study of Oxfordshire playgroups and nursery schools showed that playgroup children spent twice as much time in larger groups led by adults, where children were either passive or participated in unison. Playgroup children had fewer conversations with each other, and were more likely to be in situations near to an adult and passively supervised rather than interacting with adults. The conclusion was that this was the result of limited resources and the need to 'pack away' in hall settings with multiple uses.

Tizard, B., Hughes, M., Carmichael, H. and Pinkerton, G. (1983) 'Language and Social Class: Is Verbal Deprivation a Myth?' in *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* vol. 24 no. 4, pp 533-542.
This study is based on 30 children around the age of 4 years, half of whom were working class and half middle class. The children's language, and that of the adults with whom they interacted, was recorded in nursery school and at home and coded according to its cognitive uses. The findings indicate only slight differences in levels of cognitive code-use between working class and middle class mothers and that children used much more cognitively challenging functions of language at home than at nursery. Nursery teachers included many cognitive uses in their talk, but each child 'received' much less of such talk in nursery than at home. Teachers also directed more of their cognitive use utterances to middle class children.

Wood, E. and Bennett, N. (1998) 'Teachers' Theories of Play: Constructivist or Social Constructivist?' in *Early Child Development and Care,* vol. 140, pp 17-30. Overseas Publishers Association.
The authors examined nine reception teachers' theories of play and how these theories translated into practice. The teachers showed a largely Piagetian developmental approach to play at the beginning of the research, but during later stages, involving reflection on video-taped

practice, dissatisfaction with what they saw led them to adopt a more social constructivist approach and clarified their own role in the children's play. The research has implications for how research may influence practice through the involvement of practitioners in the process.

2. **Bruner, J.** (1985) ' Vygotsky: a historical and conceptual perspective' in Wertsch, J. V. (Ed) *Culture, Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp21-34.
Based on a study of individual 3 and 5 year olds working with their mothers, Bruner identifies the tutoring role as providing vicarious consciousness and describes some of the salient features. These include 'upping the ante' by gradually making the task more complex to keep the child in his/her zone of proximal development, finely adjusted for new learning and gradually replacing words and actions with words alone to instruct. Though not located in educational establishments, the research and approach do have useful implications for education, particularly in the recognition of social transaction as the vehicle of education, rather than a focus on purely individual behaviour. Bruner also suggests that three types of concepts need to be used to carry out a Vygotskian investigation of learning by transaction: i) props (curriculum) ii) processes (learning) iii) procedures (used by adult, tutor, peer).

Clarke, H. (2000) *The influence of context on young children's expression and development of scientific ideas. An exploration of the creation of shared meanings through interaction.* Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Cardiff University, 7-10 Sept. 2000.
The concept of 'context' is not thoroughly explored, but taken as 'informal' as a 'materials' table was set up and staffed by the researcher in a pre-school. Children themselves chose whether or not to participate. The results showed the ability of young pre-school children to engage in talk about and exploration of materials when guided by interaction with the researcher. This is rather like an example of a planned 'teaching moment' (see David & Goouch 2001).

David, T. and Goouch, K. (2001)'Early literacy teaching: the 'third' way'' in *Education 3 to 13,* June 2001, pp 20-24. UK: Primary School Research and Development Group.
The findings of this study could equally apply to other areas of the early year's curriculum and suggest that evidence on the impact of children's 'intentionality' (what they *think* they are trying to do) is a key factor in their 'success' in achieving a goal. Success also relates to how and whether the child's goal is in accordance with the adult interpretation of the goal. The authors suggest making use of 'teachable moments', rather than the extremes of free play or didactic teaching of sub-skills out of context. There are links here with Donaldson's (1978) writing on the importance of explaining to children the nature and purpose of systems before attempting to teach/learn the intricacies of sub-skills. There are implications for the planning and delivery of the teaching/learning interface.

Donaldson, M. (1978) *Children's Minds.* London: Fontana Press.
Donaldson's influential work used contemporary research results to show that children's thought processes are more complex than had previously been thought and far less different to adults than assumed. In particular, she drew attention to the situated nature of 'ability' and the need to take account of the context, interpretation and social meaning attached to the tasks given to children. The ways in which the contemporary researchers made the experimental tasks more understandable to the children is particularly noteworthy for those with an interest in the interaction between teaching and learning in young children. The notions of 'humanness' and 'human sense' in the work call for consideration of the full range of inter-linking factors involved in teaching and learning, including the social and emotional, rather than purely cognitive. Moving beyond the embedded 'human sense' to disembedded conscious manipulation of speech, thought and symbols is seen as the product of 'long ages of culture' (p. 123) and for an individual child to achieve this requires interaction with adults using cultural resources to that end. The importance of interaction of the child with culture through interaction with adults is therefore paramount. Donaldson sees the process of beginning to take steps beyond human sense as starting in the early stages of schooling 'or even earlier' (p. 82).

Franks, A. and Jewitt, C. (2001) 'The Meaning of Action in Learning and Teaching' in *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp 201-218. UK: Carfax Publishing.
The study argues the case for more attention to be paid to actions during teaching and learning episodes, not just speech. Although it relates to older children, the approach could have relevance to early year's education, given the importance of non-verbal aspects of communication at this age. It uses an analytical approach from bodily communication and drama education, drawing on the semiotics of social action and learning experiences, to apply to video recordings of science lessons. It sets the approach clearly within the sociocultural school of thought and adopts emphases from anthropology including seeing 'local' encounters within the wider frame of social relations. The authors conclude that actions are more than simply the 'unspoken' elements of language. They have their own functions and may be contradictory, supplementary or emphasising.

Rogoff, B. and Lave, J. (Eds.) (1984) *Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press.
The book examines the notion of thinking as intricately interwoven with the context of problem to be solved and, as is evidently sometimes the case, how knowledge and skills are generalised to new situations. In their chapter, Rogoff and Gardener point out that while cognition is context specific, in relation both to socio-history and the immediate social interactive context, if skills are to be generalised or transferred to new situations then similarities must be noticed. They suggest therefore that one of the most important aspects of adult/child interaction is the adult's role of guiding the child to make links between problem-solving contexts so that children can learn to apply skills and information they already possess and create new, deeper understandings. The authors refer to this as 'guidance in transfer'. Greenfield, in her chapter 'A Theory of the Teacher in the Learning Activities of Everyday life', draws attention to differences in details of scaffolding depending on the complexity of the skill to be learnt. She also raises questions relevant to educational settings about the skills required of the teacher for successful scaffolding, and the developmental stages of these skills.

Thornton, S. (1995) *Children Solving Problems.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
The author draws on a range of research findings to suggest that problem solving is a context-specific skill related to the accumulation of factual knowledge and to experience. She emphasises the social context. There are implications from the work for interaction with young children. These include i) attention to the goal and purpose of problem-solving and how far they are understood and shared by the child; ii) the effects on problem-solving skills of self-esteem, confidence previous success/failure (the child's self-image in relation to the situation); iii) the impact of social interaction with a skilled adult offering sensitive support, clarity and joint decision-making.

Wells, G. and Nicholls, J. (Eds.) (1985) *Language and Learning: an Interactional Perspective.* Lewes, UK: Falmer Press.
In their introduction, Wells and Nicholls set out a brief history of developments in child language study. Based on evidence from the longitudinal Bristol study, 'Language at Home and at School', the authors draw attention to two forms on interaction involved in learning: interaction between what is new and what is known, and interaction between the learner and teacher. With regard to the latter, the book draws on research that highlights the importance for learning of i) a collaborative rather than a directive style of interaction, ii) children being actively involved in forming and testing hypotheses, iii) errors for diagnosis and feedback, iv) adults being willing to negotiate in constructing meanings. Interactive strategies of 'guidance and contingent responsiveness' (p.39) best facilitate learning.

3. **Brooker, L.** (1996) 'Why do children go to school? Consulting Children in the Reception Class' in *Early Years*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp 12-16.
The article describes the author's action research project in which pre-school children were interviewed about starting school and their views of learning. This was followed up by involving children in reception in planning and monitoring their own learning for a while. Although aimed at 'individual' planning, it soon became apparent that the 'group' took some responsibility for the learning that took place. The involvement helped to soften children's

perceptions of the divide between play (what children want to do) and work (what teachers want children to do). The article is useful in that it shows how style of interaction can affect children's perceptions of learning and their actual learning. This was especially evident with regard to the routine praise/sticker approach. Once the teacher withdrew this automatic response and waited instead for the children's views of their work, there was a shift towards reflection on what had been learnt and how well it had progressed.

Childs, G. and McKay, M. (2001) 'Boys starting school disadvantaged: Implications from teachers' ratings of behaviour and achievement in the first two years' in *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 71, pp 303-314. UK: British Psychological Society.
In this study, 63 children were rated by their teachers according to learning behaviour difficulties such as distractibility, apprehension and unco-operativeness, for academic achievement and teachers' personal perceptions of the child at ages 5 and 7 years. The results indicated boys generally, but more specifically boys of lower socio-economic status (SES based on father's occupation), were more likely to be viewed negatively by the mostly female teachers. These negative ratings persisted over the two years and affected the teachers' perceptions of those children. The authors state that these images affect teachers' academic expectations of the children and the way in which these children are taught. However, no evidence appears to be presented in which the interactions between teacher and child are examined to support this assertion.

Daniels, S., Shorrocks-Taylor, D. and Redfern, E. (2000) 'Can Starting Summer-born Children Earlier at Infant School Improve their National Curriculum Results?' in *Oxford Review of Education,* vol. 26, no. 2, pp 207-220. UK: Carfax Publishing.
In this study of children's National Curriculum attainment test results at the end of key stage 1, it was found that summer born children's results were not significantly affected by increasing their time in school from 7 to 9 terms by starting reception at an earlier age. The study did not investigate why this should be the case in any detail,

but suggested possible reasons as being maturational, curriculum-based, or related to social interaction processes. The authors suggest the last two factors to be particularly important and refer to the impact of teacher expectations on tasks given and pupil performance. Whilst not looking at the interaction in this study, the authors do refer to Kernan and Hayes' (1998 see below) study which did investigate the learning experiences of four year olds.

Kernan, M. and Hayes, N. (1998) 'Teacher Expectations and Learning Experiences of Four-Year-Olds in Preschool and Primary Settings' in *Irish Educational Times,* vol. 17, pp 222-240.
A study based on 396 four-year-olds in Irish pre-school and primary school settings, it compares teachers' beliefs about important aspects of early years provision, and detailed observations of children's experiences. (The study is based on the IEA Pre-primary Project – see Kernan and Hayes 1999 below). The study used measurement instruments devised and piloted by the International Co-ordinating Committee of the IEA Pre-primary Project. For this paper, the relevant two were the Expectations Questionnaire (teachers and parents) and the Observation Systems, using the Target Child observation technique in a natural setting. This was originally developed by Sylva et al, 1980 and further developed here to include adult management of children's time, children's activities and adult behaviour towards children.

The findings show a high level of agreement amongst teachers of four-year-olds in school and pre-school settings about the most important aspects of learning for children of this age. The top two priorities were social skills with peers and language skills. They saw their responsibility as teachers as being to encourage social skills with peers and to teach pre-academic skills. However, the observations showed a higher proportion of time in schools spent on pre-academic skills, with only half as much time spent on personal and social skills. In pre-schools, time was more evenly divided between personal/social, expressive and physical skills with less time on pre-academic skills. What the article does not explore, though the larger study may well, is to what extent teachers feel that personal and social skills can be developed alongside pre-academic skills, almost incidentally.

The authors suggest that the value of integrative play-based learning is being lost for four-year-olds in school. Of interest also is how little value is apparently placed on children's skills of interaction with adults, as an expectation or teaching responsibility. Given the weight of evidence and theory from the sociocultural school of thought on the importance of adult/child interaction to learning, this is noteworthy.

Kernan, M. and Hayes, N. (1999) 'Parent and Teacher Expectations of 4-Year-Olds in Ireland' in *Early Years*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp 26-37.
The study investigates the beliefs of 113 teachers and 382 parents of 4 year olds with regard to the relative importance of eight areas of development usually associated with the education of four-year-olds. It is based on work from the IEA Preprimary Project, a cross-national study of preprimary education in Ireland (Hayes et al 1997). The results showed a stated high regard for social and emotional development, language skills and positive attitudes to learning. Teachers did not see such a need for children to develop good interactive skills with adults, but parents thought this was important. There was 'low to moderate' agreement between parent/teacher expectations. The study drew attention to the work of Bennett and Kell (1989) which found differences between infant teachers' stated aims of promoting social and emotional development and the actual school experience of young children dominated by cognitive development. (**Refs.** Bennett, N. and Kell, J. (1989) *A Good Start? Four Year Olds in Infant Schools.* Oxford: Blackwell Education. Hayes, N., O'Flaherty, J. with Kernan, M. (1997) *A Window on Early Education in Ireland: The First National Report of the IEA Preprimary Project,* Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.)

Nutbrown, C. (1998) 'Early Assessment-Examining the Baseline' in *Early Years*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp 50-61.
Although the study is an examination of two baseline instruments, it raises and discusses convincingly how choice in the methods of assessment and their linked primary purpose impacts upon the value attached to certain aspects of development or 'skills'. This in turn affects what is delivered in terms of planned curriculum and experienced in interaction in the classroom. Such choices are not merely management tools peripheral to interaction

between teacher and pupil, but are central to the day to day experience of how young children learn.

4. **Edwards, D. and Maybin, J.** (1987) *Communication and Education: The Development of Understanding in the Classroom.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
The authors draw on research into classroom discourse to show that, even in infant classes, educational discourse is a highly constrained, teacher-led pattern of talking. Referring to work by Donaldson (1978) and Rogoff and Lave (1984) which showed that the social context of thought affects its clarity, they point out that an understanding or perception of the social situation colours the choice of mental procedures undertaken. They therefore call for a reassessment of the importance of classroom talk for the creation of shared contexts and meanings between teacher and pupils.

Mercer, N. (1995) *The Guided Construction of Knowledge – talk amongst teachers and learners.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
Mercer examines the process involved in teaching and learning from a sociocultural perspective. The guidance strategies employed in classrooms are described and analysed. Although Mercer's work is focused on older children rather than early years education or the transition from pre-school to school, it does place the study of the 'guidance of learning' in educational establishments. Much of the previous work on guidance of learning has been on parents with young children at home. He provides some of the structures for analysis of this kind and suggests they should include consideration of such things as history, relationships, actions, purpose (e.g. curriculum) and context. His account of the guided construction of knowledge is one based on the reality of one adult to many learners working to a curriculum within a frame of educational discourse, and points to the importance of learners developing confidence in new discourses by engaging in them. As such, it has implications for the study of the interaction of young children around the time of school entry.

Wegerif, R., Mercer, N., Dawes, L. (1999) 'From social interaction to individual reasoning: an empirical investigation of a possible socio-cultural model of

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cognitive development' in *Learning and Instruction*, vol. 9, pp 493-516. Oxford: Elsevier Science.
This study shows that exploratory talk can improve reasoning, can be taught, can transfer between educational contexts, and can improve individuals' scores on non-verbal reasoning tests. It supports the hypothesis that social reasoning can improve scores on measures of individual reasoning. Although the study was carried out with children aged 8-9 years, the findings could have implications for younger children with regard to how group exploratory talk may be fostered, given that language is at an earlier stage of development in younger children. If reasoning is 'induction into a social practice', as suggested, then there may be value in teaching specific social practices such as exploratory talk from an early age. The study also offers something of a bridge between a sociocultural perspective of learning and thinking, and traditional non-cultural 'intramental' research into cognitive development. This could serve towards a model for research that might reconcile the different approaches to children's learning.

Willes, M. (1983) *Children into Pupils*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Children learn a new form of discourse when beginning school, newer to some than to others. It is implicit and depends on the reading of prompts and clues. Willes argues the case for teachers becoming more aware of the nature of classroom discourse, their role in the discourse, and the possibilities attached to its modification and more explicit use. She also describes the different patterns of discourse relating to different types of activities and teaching in a first class. These included a contextualised, elliptical and implicit variety of English used by teachers for a significant part of each day when working with individuals or small groups. She identifies the link between discourse and purpose, noting that the style of whole class discourse derives from a need for control rather than from a directly educational function. Importantly, she also points out that well-ordered, collaborative, interactive teacher-with-whole-class texts conceal great variation in individuals' comprehending participation.

5. **Heath, S.B.** (1983) *Ways with Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ethnographic study of how children in two communities in SE USA (white working class and black working class) learn to use language and literacy, and how this is part of the wider cultural pattern of the communities. The study contrasts these two cultural patterns of language use with that of the 'townspeople' who hold power in schools and workplaces. It then goes on to examine the discontinuities between home and school 'ways with words', and the effects of these on the educational achievements of children from the different communities. It draws out the complexities of the language/culture socialisation process and calls into question more superficial, single factor analyses of the link between language socialisation and success at school, such as amount of parent-child interaction and formal structures of language. It also describes how teachers began to build bridges between the school/community differences by trying to embed class materials in the lives of the pupils and to make explicit aspects of language and context in both home and school domains. This was fuelled by a belief not in a 'remedial' approach, but in enrichment benefiting all. They saw the outcomes as allowing 'some children to succeed who might not otherwise have done so' (p. 354). Though broader in scope than the period around school entry, its contribution is of fundamental importance. It highlights interaction as being far more than language exchange, but as also including many aspects of culture, time, space and social rules.

Jowett, S. and Sylva, K. (1986) 'Does kind of pre-school matter?' in *Educational Research* vol. 28 no. 1, pp 21-31, NFER.

In this study, evidence is presented suggesting that local authority nursery classes prepared children for school better than playgroups, using matched groups of children. The study categorised children's play activity during their first year of school in terms of cognitive complexity, social participation, language, and reactions to difficulties. Evidence was found that ex-nursery children were more independent, more able to concentrate and more able to use adults as resources than ex-playgroup children and so were seen as more 'ready' for school. In terms of conceptual attainment, no significant differences were found between the two groups. The results were attributed in part to playgroups being less well-resourced, with more large-

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group activity and less time for independent but enriched play/problem solving.

Kenner, A. C. (1996) *Social Scripts: Children Writing in a Multilingual Nursery.* Southampton University unpublished PhD thesis.
The research adopts a social semiotic approach to the understanding and study of early writing development of 3-4 year olds with regard to script and genre. The study involved introducing multilingual texts into the role play area of a nursery and participant observation of children's production, use of and behaviour around texts. Notions of genre and symbolic representation were already forming and continued to develop through play, interactions with others around texts and observations of others' uses of texts.

Mercer, N. (1987) *Communication and Education: Language Experience and Educational Attainment.* Milton Keynes: OU Press.
Mercer offers an outline and critique of theory and evidence relating to language experience and attainment in school from the 1950's, 60's up to 1987, critiquing 'deprivation theory' and 'difference theory'. The book highlights, amongst other things, the work of Gordon Wells and the Bristol Language at Home and School Project (1972). The study drew attention to associations between children making above average progress in school after one year and the home language characteristics of reciprocity, collaboration and negotiated construction of meaning between adults and children.

Mercer, N. (Ed) (1988) *Language and Literacy from an Educational Perspective Vol 2: In Schools.* Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
The book contains a useful set of readings, particularly in Section 1 on home, school and society. It includes articles by Tizard, Hughes, Carmichael and Pinkerton (1983, see above), S.B. Heath, and H. Rosen. Heath critiques the work of Tizard and Hughes on language at home and at nursery school. She points to the importance of creating shared backgrounds with or between children in educational establishments if the verbal environment is to be one in which language development and linked cognitive skills can flourish. Rosen critiques Heath's 'Ways with Words'

very favourably, though he does suggest that the work should take account of the wider sociocultural history, particularly of racism.

Wells, G. (Ed) (1981) *Learning Through Interaction: the Study of Language Development.* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.
The book is based on work for the Bristol 'Language at Home and School' project. In the chapter by V. Walkerdine and C. Sinha, 'Developing Linguistic Strategies in Young School Children', evidence from the authors' research is used to show that children understood tasks, tests or utterances based on previous similar experiences and what the task/utterance signified for them. They suggest the need to examine processes or procedures of signification if we are to understand children's performance. Teachers must therefore be willing to uncover what signifies for children, and in which ways, in order to build on their understandings.

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